



Representative Jeri Costa

38th Legislative District

1997 Legislative Report

Dear Friend,

May 1997

The 105-day legislative session adjourned on April 27. For the first time in nearly 40 years, lawmakers completed their work during a budget-writing year on time. While lawmakers worked together and with the governor to accomplish many things, like a new welfare reform plan, and a major overhaul of our juvenile justice system, there were major differences between Democrats and Republicans during the 1997 session. We differed over how to best provide meaningful property tax relief to homeowners versus giving more tax cuts to big business; increase affordable health care for working families; make changes to the Growth Management Act; and, maintain our state's commitment to education reform.

This year, I served as the Ranking Democrat on the House Law & Justice Committee, which dealt with many "law and order" issues such as juvenile justice, crime victims, and sex offenders. Yet, we also spent an inordinate amount of time on divisive social issues such as abortion, same-gender marriages, and terminating parent-child relationships. Additionally, many issues that passed the House with strong bi-partisan support died in the Senate.

As a service to you, the chart on this page highlights the status of many noteworthy bills that were considered this year, while the following pages provide further detail on the major issues. I encourage you to read this overview and share with me your comments, because it's important for me to hear what you think.

Your state Representative,

Jeralita "Jeri" Costa

DID IT PASS IN 1997?

BUDGET	PASSED	P. 2
B & O TAX CUTS	PASSED	P. 2
BREAST FEEDING RIGHTS	DID NOT PASS	P. 2
CHARTER SCHOOLS	DID NOT PASS	P. 2
FIREARMS SAFETY	DID NOT PASS	P. 2
HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING	PASSED	P. 3
JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM	PASSED	P. 3
GAS TAX	DID NOT PASS	P. 2
GROWTH MANAGEMENT CHANGES	DID NOT PASS	P. 3
OFFSHORE OIL DRILLING BAN	PASSED	P. 3
LOCAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE FUNDING	PASSED	P. 3
PROPERTY TAX RELIEF	SENT TO VOTERS	P. 3
SEAHAWKS STADIUM	SENT TO VOTERS	P. 3
VICTIMS RIGHTS	PASSED	P. 4
WELFARE REFORM	PASSED	P. 4
WORKFORCE TRAINING	PASSED	P. 4

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Representative Jeri Costa

Budget

Lawmakers approved a \$19 billion state budget a week before the end of session. Displeased with funding levels for education, health care, children's programs and the environment, the governor vetoed many sections of the budget. As a result, budget-writers responded with a revised spending plan that provided additional money to address these major concerns. Even with these additions, the budget is well below the I-601 spending limit and holds the growth of government to its lowest level in 25 years. However, many programs (i.e., health care and workforce training) traditionally supported by dedicated funds were shifted to the state's general fund. Down the road, critics warn that the pressures on the general fund will only intensify and critical programs such as education will feel the pinch even more deeply in future budgets.

Business Taxes

The most significant tax cut of the year was the lowering of the Business & Occupation Tax (B&O) to pre-1993 levels. This tax reduction primarily affects service businesses which experienced tax increases during the fiscal crisis of 1993. The B&O tax reductions passed the Legislature with strong bi-partisan support and will save businesses well over \$300 million over the next four years.

Breast Feeding

Women who breast-feed infant children would no longer have to endure discrimination in restaurants, shopping centers, or in the workplace under legislation that I sponsored this year. HB 1213 would protect mothers who nurse from harassment by excluding breast-feeding from indecent exposure statutes and making it unfair to discriminate against women who nurse in public places. The legislation provides for a maximum fine of \$1,000 for violations. Many mothers brought their infants to Olympia in order to testify in support of the bill, however, the chairman of the Law & Justice Committee refused to hold a vote on the measure. I hope we can pass this measure in 1998.

Charter Schools

Our state constitution says it and I believe it, education is our state's paramount duty. That's why it's so important that we continue on our course to improve student

learning in our public schools through education reform. However, these efforts were short-circuited this year as a creative and bi-partisan charter schools measure died in the Senate. Unlike I-177, which voters rejected last November, HB 2019 would have allowed the creation of up to 50 charter schools that are required to meet the rigorous new academic standards, and are held accountable by local school boards. In addition, other education reform efforts were targeted by the budget ax. Virtually \$16 million in federal funding was refused by the budget-writers because of a paranoia that the federal government will dictate what our students should learn. I'll continue to work hard for our public schools.

Firearm Safety

When it comes to safety, the legislative session may be remembered for one critical issue that was avoided. HB 2078 would make it a gross misdemeanor for a gun owner to leave a loaded firearm in a place where an unsupervised child is likely to gain access. Named for an 8-year old Marysville girl who was accidentally shot and killed at the home of a 10-year-old friend, it represented an historic compromise among gun rights and gun control advocates, as well as crime victims. Right now, 15 other states, including California, have passed similar legislation to prevent deaths from accidental shootings. Unfortunately, the "Whitney Graves Bill" never was brought up for a vote. This will be a priority for me again in the 1998 session.

Gas Tax

One of the major disappointments this year was the failure of the Legislature to adequately address the critical issue of congestion on our highways. While I don't take lightly the issue of raising any taxes, as one of the fastest growing counties in the state, Snohomish County would clearly benefit from an increase in highway construction. For three years now, I have advocated increased state spending to construct HOV lanes through Everett to ease gridlock. However, lack of regional support in the Senate killed a plan for a modest increase in the gas tax to pay for dozens of needed improvements. We must maintain our infrastructure to get people to and from work, and ensure that goods are efficiently transported to their intended destinations. I will continue to look at ways to address our transportation needs.

38th Legislative District



Growth Management

The Growth Management Act (GMA) was enacted in 1990 to reduce sprawl and the costs of growth to taxpayers while preserving the character of our communities, the environment, and our rural areas. In 1996, lawmakers directed the Land Use Study Commission to address concerns that the GMA has gone too far in curbing development and become too intrusive into local decisions. The Commission forwarded several common-sense recommendations to the Legislature. However, Republicans, particularly those in the House, largely ignored them and instead launched a series of attacks on the GMA. As a result of partisan bickering, no changes were made to the GMA this year.

Higher Education

Lawmakers approved \$2.3 million in capital improvements for Everett Community College. The money will be used to purchase land for a new entrance and an instruction technology center, and to remodel classrooms, make roof, siding and interior repairs. In addition, the prospect of a new four-year college in the north sound region improved this year as lawmakers approved \$376,000 for the cooperative effort between Snohomish, Island, and Skagit counties to evaluate and select a site for the new campus.

Juvenile Justice

Twenty years after approving the last major re-write of juvenile justice laws, lawmakers unanimously approved a sweeping set of reforms aimed at holding violent teen offenders responsible for their actions, giving judges more flexibility, and eliminating outdated juvenile sentencing standards. As one of the chief advocates of the reforms, I feel proud of the solid accomplishments lawmakers have achieved to improve public safety by punishing the most violent juvenile offenders, while also providing the ability of our justice system to reach out to troubled youth and prevent future crimes.

Local Criminal Justice Program

The Snohomish County Prosecutor has made it clear recently that he needs additional funding to deal with an increase in adult crime in our communities. Yet, I was appalled when House and Senate budget-writers failed to continue state funding for the highly successful

Snohomish County Pre-Prosecution Diversion Program. This program diverts some first-time offenders from the traditional justice system. Offenders who qualify must admit guilt, pay restitution, undergo intensive supervision for up to three years, and attend required treatment programs. Compared to those offenders who are convicted and sent to prison, offenders who are diverted from prosecution re-offend at a significantly lower rate. In the 1997 budget, the program will receive less than half the needed funds to continue this program which protects public safety and saves taxpayer money.

Offshore Oil Drilling Ban

Frequent public opinion polls demonstrate a clear and unwavering commitment of Washington residents to preserve the quality of our natural environment for future generations. In many respects, our quality of life is based on abundant, clean air and water, maintaining salmon populations, and preserving the beauty of our mountains, streams, and coastlines. In 1997, lawmakers achieved a major victory with the approval of a permanent ban on oil drilling off Washington's coast. Washington becomes the last West Coast state (besides Alaska) to enact a permanent moratorium on oil exploration off our coast.

Property Tax Relief

In 1997, House and Senate Democrats succeeded in focusing the tax-relief debate on homeowners by proposing the Homeowner's Property Tax Credit. This plan would have given nearly all homeowners with a \$205 tax break. We argued that businesses had received a fair share of tax cuts already and that homeowners should receive the bulk of a property tax cut. Unlike other tax cut plans, our proposal targets relief solely to homeowners. Unfortunately, the Republican majority approved a plan that would give the average homeowner only a \$17 cut each year. I voted against the plan, and the governor agreed by vetoing the plan. However, the measure will appear on the November ballot to allow voters to decide.

Seahawks Stadium

For the second time in two years, lawmakers found themselves deciding the fate of a professional sports franchise. Paul Allen, the potential owner of the Seattle Seahawks, has said he will purchase the Seahawks only if a new stadium is constructed, subject to a vote of the people. By the end of the session, a majority of lawmak-

ers had voted to place a stadium-financing plan on the June 17 ballot. If approved by the voters, the stadium would be paid for by an 8-year extension of the King County hotel-motel tax, lottery revenues, and a \$100 million contribution by Mr. Allen. Now, all Washington residents will decide whether or not to build a new stadium for the Seahawks.

Victims Rights

Crime victims gained additional status and respect within the criminal justice system as a result of action taken during the 1997 legislative session. Under two new laws, crime victims will be able to have an advocate present at any judicial proceeding to ensure that victims and witnesses are not subjected to undue harassment, embarrassment, or overly-aggressive questioning by opposing lawyers. In addition, lawmakers approved a measure I proposed to increase prison sentences for manslaughter crimes. These are just the latest steps that needed to be taken to balance the scales of justice for innocent people who are victims of crime.

Welfare Reform

In April, the governor signed into law a landmark welfare reform bill, which requires that those who can work must do so as a condition of receiving state assistance. While the record shows that I voted against this particular measure (before the governor vetoed numerous sections), I voted yes on a plan that was virtually identical to what the governor signed into law. Consistent with the new federal welfare reform law, the state's WorkFirst program imposes a five-year lifetime limit on welfare benefits, while increasing funding for child care, job training, and

other means of support necessary to help families break the cycle of welfare dependency and return to work.

Workforce Training

The Boeing layoffs a few years ago showed us that unemployed workers often need additional education or job training to make the transition to another job. In response to this need, lawmakers in 1997 re-authorized the successful Workforce Training program at our community and technical colleges, although the program was cut by several million dollars. The Timber Retraining Benefits Program, targeted to displaced timber and salmon workers, was also cut leaving about 950 unemployed workers in Snohomish County (out of a current 1200) without extended unemployment benefits while they complete community college and retrain for new jobs.

Democrats tried unsuccessfully to keep full funding for this successful program.

About This Newsletter..

I find that newsletters are one of the most effective and efficient ways for me to correspond with the people of the 38th District. This report cost approximately 28 cents for printing and postage. I routinely mail newsletters to registered voters. However, I realize that people receive a large amount of unsolicited mail, or that some people receive legislative information from other sources. If you prefer not to receive reports like this in the future, please call the toll-free legislative hotline (1-800-562-6000) and request that I remove your name and address from my mailing list. I would also appreciate hearing how I might improve my newsletters to better serve you.

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